



NEWS

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See MCI v. FCC, 515 F.2d 385 (D.C. Cir. 1974).

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WIRELESS TELECOMMUNICATIONS BUREAU RELEASES REPORT ON THE PREVENTION OF WIRELESS UNINTENTIONAL 911 CALLS

Washington, D.C. – Today, the FCC’s Wireless Telecommunications Bureau released a report on the prevention of unintentional wireless 911 calls. The Staff Report responds to a request from various public safety organizations and reports on steps being taken by those in the telecommunications industry to eliminate the occurrence of unintentional 911 calls.

Through its Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau (CGB), the Commission has issued a Consumer Alert explaining how consumers can prevent calling 911 unintentionally. The alert will be sent electronically over the next few days to roughly 1,300 consumer groups and individual consumers who subscribe to CGB’s consumer information e-mail service. This alert is available through the Bureau’s homepage on the Commission’s website at <http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/unint911.html>.

Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs), which handle 911 calls, must deal with the high percentage of calls where, because the call has been initiated unintentionally, perhaps from a pocket or purse, no caller is on the other end of the line. Unintentional 911 calls occur from wireless telephones when a consumer accidentally presses a key on his or her handset that is automatically pre-programmed to dial 911. Consumers unknowingly tie up a 911 call taker at the other end of the line who has to confirm, based on little information, that the call is accidental and not from a person in distress. This results in the diversion of PSAP personnel and resources from the intake of other 911 calls reporting real emergencies.

In December 2001, the National Emergency Number Association (NENA) wrote to twenty-one wireless carriers, requesting information on what each carrier had done or was willing to do to reduce or eliminate unintentional 911 calls. In its letter, NENA proposed several solutions that it stated could best be achieved through a joint cooperative effort by carriers, manufacturers and the public safety community. NENA asked for a commitment to voluntary action by carriers and manufacturers to remedy this problem. In January 2002, the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials – International, Inc. and the National Association of State 9-1-1 Administrators wrote to the Commission, requesting an examination of the “very serious problems posed by unintentional wireless calls to 911.”

Building on NENA's and APCO's efforts, the Wireless Telecommunications Bureau investigated the problem by contacting several major carriers such as Nextel, Verizon, Sprint, T-Mobile, Cingular, AT&T, and ALLTEL and the three major handset manufacturers -- Motorola, Nokia, and Sony-Ericsson -- in order to identify steps being taken to assist in the elimination of 911 calls.

In response to these requests, handset manufacturers and wireless carriers have acknowledged the existence of the unintentional 911 calls problem and have committed to taking active steps to reduce the occurrence of such calls, including working with PSAPs and public safety organizations. All wireless carriers surveyed have requested that manufacturers deactivate the auto-dial 911 feature prior to shipment of new handsets to the carriers. Nearly all carriers have also attempted to reduce the occurrence of unintentional 911 calls by providing their customers with educational information through inserts in their monthly bills, through direct mailings/newsletters, and through postings on carrier websites. The major manufacturers of wireless handsets have reported that currently none of their phones come pre-programmed with an auto-dial 911 feature.

The Cellular Telecommunications and Internet Association (CTIA) has also assisted the efforts to reduce unintentional 911 calls by recently incorporating a requirement in its certification program that CTIA-certified handsets may not be pre-programmed with an auto-dial 911 feature.

Consumers who possess handsets with the auto-dial 911 feature can assist efforts to eliminate the unintentional call problem by disabling the auto-dial 911 feature or by locking their key pad.

Commission staff will assist efforts to eliminate unintentional 911 calls by continuing to monitor, in partnership with public safety organizations, developments in this area, including steps taken by carriers and handset manufacturers. Commission staff will also be contacting additional carriers and manufacturers to address this issue.

If the actions taken by wireless carriers and equipment manufacturers do not appear to be ameliorating the problem, Commission staff intends to seek specific information about the causes, and initiate action to further reduce the volume of unintentional wireless 911 calls.

Action by the Wireless Telecommunications Bureau December 11, 2002, by Staff Report (DA 02-3413) in.

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